

News



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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EDITOR'S NOTE: A copy of "Analysis of the Five-Year PACT Longitudinal Data: Student Mobility, Student Retention in Grade and PACT Achievement Over Time" is available on the EOC Web site at www.sceoc.org under "News." Summaries of district performance are included in the Appendix of the report. The study was presented to the EOC, at its October 10 meeting. Dr. Gerrita Postlewait, Superintendent, Horry County Schools; Dr. Ed Taylor, Superintendent, Laurens 55 Schools; Ms. Cindy Saylor, SC Dept. of Education; and Dr. Bill Brown, Brownstar Consulting presented information to the committee related to the study.

Unique Five Year Study Shows Student Achievement Improving in Math, Slipping in English Language Arts

Columbia – In a comprehensive analysis of five consecutive years of individual student Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) data covering 2000-2004 released Monday, findings show English Language Arts (ELA) achievement on PACT declines over time while achievement in math improves slightly.

The study is distinctive to South Carolina since most states have not administered their standards-based accountability tests in grades three through eight for an extended period of time. The first PACT tests were given statewide in 1999, replacing the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) tests.

"We now have a snapshot of individual student performance over time in South Carolina," said Jo Anne Anderson, Executive Director of the EOC. "Drilling down to the student level arms us with information we can use to allocate resources and time properly."

The analysis examines trends in achievement in math and English Language Arts (ELA), student mobility, and retention over the five years of study. The comparative information was obtained from a database containing data for two groups: students who attended grade 3 and

students who attended grade 4 in the 1999-2000 school year. Data from 79,923 students compose the five-year database.

Student achievement in Math

- In 2000, 33 percent of students scored *Below Basic* in math, the lowest range of achievement on the PACT. In 2004, when the majority of these students were in 7th or 8th grade, 30 percent scored *Below Basic*.
- In math, 62 percent of students who scored *Below Basic* in 2000 also scored *Below Basic* in 2004.
- In contrast, 26 percent of students scored *Proficient or Advanced*, the highest levels of achievement on PACT, in 2000. In 2004, the 7th or 8th grade year for most students, 27 percent scored *Proficient or Advanced*.
- Seventy-one percent of students scored *Proficient or Advanced* in both 2000 and 2004 in math.

"It is clear that students are maintaining high levels of achievement in math," stated David Potter, EOC Director of Research, who presented the study. "We are also bringing a percentage of students up from the lowest range of achievement over time."

Student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA)

- In 2000, 25 percent of students scored *Below Basic* in ELA. In 2004, when the majority of these students were in 7th or 8th grade, 28 percent scored *Below Basic*.
- Seventy percent of students who scored *Below Basic* in 2000 also scored *Below Basic* in 2004 in ELA.
- In contrast, 40 percent of students scored *Proficient or Advanced* in 2000. In 2004, the 7th or 8th grade year for most students, only 25 percent scored *Proficient or Advanced*.
- Fifty-four percent of students scored *Proficient and Advanced* in both 2000 and 2004.

Potter said the study clearly indicates a need for an emphasis to be placed on literacy and reading skills.

"It is distressing that a majority of our students who initially perform at low levels in English Language Arts score at the same low levels throughout their elementary and middle school careers," stated Potter. "Conversely, students who are achieving at high levels early on are not able to maintain."

The study also examined the level of mobility over time of students from district to district. Eleven percent of the students in the study moved from one district to another *at least once* during the five-year period. Two percent of students attended *at least three* different school districts during the five-year period of study.

"The issue of mobility needs to be examined because it can provide insights into student achievement, stated Potter, "Students moving from district to district need to adjust to a different

physical and social environment, which may adversely affect their school performance until they have successfully adapted.

An analysis of the progress of students who repeat a grade level, nine percent of the students studied over the five year-period, show that after an initial peak, ELA achievement declines and math achievement remains stable, not increasing. It is estimated that the additional costs for the extra year of instruction required for these groups of students between 2001-2004 is \$42,986.681.

“The analyses suggest that remediation strategies other than retention should be considered,” Potter suggested. “The considerable investment currently devoted to grade retention may be better used for prevention of failure rather than remediation after a student fails.”

The EOC is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected officials who are appointed by legislative leaders and the governor to monitor and review the implementation of the 1998 South Carolina Education Accountability Act, the Education Improvement Act, and the K-12 system.